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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RANGOON 001055

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [CH](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: CHINA'S AMBASSADOR TO BURMA: "NON-INTERVENTION WITH SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS"

REF: A. RANGOON 1029

[¶](#)B. RANGOON 1031

Classified By: COM Carmen Martinez for reasons 1.5 (B/D).

SUMMARY

[¶](#)1. (C) Summary: The Chinese Ambassador to Burma provided us on August 27 with an overview of the purpose and results of SPDC Vice Chairman General Maung Aye's recent "routine" China visit, China's negative view of U.S. sanctions and their implications for regime change, the rationale behind recent Chinese troop movements along the Burmese border, and the potential for additional Chinese economic aid to Burma. China, according to their Ambassador, will maintain its long-standing policy of non-interference in Burma's internal affairs, while actively engaging with the current regime to bring about economic growth and gradual political change. U.S. sanctions, he argued, are counterproductive and will lead to greater suspicion of ASSK by the military regime and diminish prospects for political change in Burma. End Summary.

General Maung Aye's China Visit: Business as Usual

[¶](#)2. (C) During an August 27 meeting with COM, Chinese Ambassador to Burma Li Jinjun offered that a top-level Burmese mission to China in late August had been planned for almost a full year, implying it was not a reaction to the events of May 30th. Li acknowledged, however, that the participation of the regime's second in command, SPDC Vice Chairman General Maung Aye, had not been expected and only came about after the events of May 30. Li added that the proximity of Maung Aye's visit to a realignment of the Burmese government following his return to Rangoon (refs A, B) was merely a "coincidence."

[¶](#)3. (C) Li described the Maung Aye trip as a "normal and friendly" bilateral visit, noting that similar exchanges, particularly military, are routine. Li affirmed press reports that Maung Aye had met with leaders from China's Central Military Commission (CMC), as well as with President Hu Jintao and State Councilor Tang Jiaxuan, to discuss regional and bilateral issues. Li demurred on the COM's request for more details and stated that China's Burma policy was consistent and continued to be based on China's "five basic principles of coexistence and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries," points he said both Hu Jintao and Tang Jiaxuan had emphasized during their meetings with Maung Aye.

"Sanctions Interfere...With Our Paychecks"

[¶](#)4. (C) Li explained that China opposes U.S. sanctions on Burma and views the measures as interference in Burma's internal affairs. Nonetheless, because the current situation in Burma has led to heightened international concern, China has urged the regime to take "proper steps" to keep the process of national reconciliation moving forward. The key, said Li, is increasing the speed of economic development. Too much pressure on Burma, such as that being imposed by the U.S. and others, will be counterproductive and undermine chances for the speedy release of ASSK, he opined.

[¶](#)5. (C) Li said that prior to the Maung Aye visit he had met with SPDC Chairman Senior General Than Shwe, who was "emotional and angry" over U.S. sanctions and international pressure placed on Burma. Than Shwe complained to the Chinese Ambassador that the international community failed to recognize his contributions to Burma, alleging that foreign governments were engaged in efforts to get rid of him. Ambassador Li assessed that the Burmese generals believe the SPDC is being treated unfairly, and it is therefore difficult for them to take steps to release ASSK from detention.

[¶](#)6. (C) Li observed that U.S. sanctions have hurt Chinese businesses in Burma, leaving them with a "negative impression of the U.S." because the greatest impact is on foreign manufacturers and Burmese citizens, not the Burmese regime. COM responded that the violent May 30 attack had required a strong reaction from the U.S. and that sanctions were a

message to the SPDC that the regime needs to make a credible move to return to the pre-May 30 era by releasing ASSK and others and beginning a meaningful political dialogue. (Note:

At a follow-on lunch we hosted for the Chinese Embassy's political section, the Chinese political counselor expressed dismay over U.S. sanctions, and then emotionally complained that she and her colleagues are unable to receive their U.S. dollar-denominated salaries because wire transfers from their New York accounts have been blocked for over a month.)

We Shall Engage

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17. (C) Li said that whether the current regime ultimately will accept a government led by ASSK depends on whether mutual mistrust can be reduced; ASSK cannot continue with her confrontations and expect the support of the Burmese Army should she become leader of the country. Furthermore, current international pressure makes the military government even more mistrustful of ASSK's intentions. The international community, including the U.S., EU, and ASEAN, must take immediate steps to reduce pressure on the regime, as positive change will only be possible in an environment where an inclusive, rather than an isolationist, approach is used. Thus, China will maintain close contact with the current government. Li indicated he had urged U.N. Special Envoy for Burma Razali Ismail to put pressure on the U.S. to adopt a similar approach.

18. (C) Li said the recent appointment of former SPDC Secretary -1 General Khin Nyunt as the Prime Minister was not

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a surprise and would be helpful in improving Burma's international image. This realignment suggests the military regime may be moving toward separation of political and military affairs, a move which should facilitate the resumption of the dialogue process. Li said he viewed the appointment as a promotion and believes that Khin Nyunt's responsibilities should be further modified to include the SPDC's economic portfolio, but exclude his current role as chief military intelligence, in order to effect greater separation of powers between the military and civilian sides of the government.

Unifying PLA Border Protection

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19. (C) COM inquired about reports of recent Chinese troop movements on the Sino-Burmese border. Li acknowledged the reports were true, but said that the PLA movements were also a "coincidence", intimating they had nothing to do with Maung Aye's visit to Beijing, the SPDC realignment, or recent Thai threats against the ethnic Chinese United Wa State Army (UWSA) in Burma. Li explained that the PLA has a national responsibility for maintaining China's land borders, but until recently Burma and the DPRK have been exceptions to this practice. In January 2003, Li claimed he personally lobbied Luo Gan, who is in charge of border management, suggesting that unified management of China's borders under the PLA would be beneficial in combating illegal migration, drug trafficking, and prohibited mining and forest activities. Li said that while Beijing had made the decision at the beginning of the year to replace police and immigration personnel on the Burmese border with regular PLA units, central authorities had just recently implemented the order.

More Economic Aid?

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10. (C) Pol/Econ Chief inquired about the mid-August signing of a USD 200 million Chinese loan to Burma for the purpose of constructing a hydropower plant. Li noted the timing of this event was another "coincidence;" the "soft" loan had been agreed to in January 2003 but the final signing, originally scheduled to take place in April or May, had to be postponed because of the SARS crisis in China and the May 30th "incident". Li commented that the shortage of electricity in Burma is not only contributing to a stagnant economic development situation, but also is impacting negatively on the lives of the Burmese people. Li did not respond whether China had plans at this time for additional loans or assistance, but intimated that bilateral aid would continue to be a primary policy tool in Burma.

Comment: We'll Do It Our Way

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11. (C) Li is a polished diplomat who smoothly and without apology articulated his government's seemingly contradictory policies of non-interference in Burma and intense engagement with the SPDC. While there are some areas of agreement between the U.S. and China on Burma, including the need for a quick resumption of dialogue and significant economic and political reform, Li gave every indication that China will continue to follow its own path and cannot be expected to

support U.S. sanctions or added pressure on Burma's regime to release ASSK and resume a political dialogue. To the contrary, Li suggested that China is looking for opportunities to provide the generals with support and succor in order to offset their increased isolation from the rest of the international community. This attitude indicates hopes that China would take an active role in urging meaningful change by the SPDC are misplaced, at least for now. End Comment.  
Martinez